

**The Poor in Spirit**  
*The Beatitudes #2 – Mt 5:3*

*But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."*

You have a thousand keys on your key ring. You didn't mean for it to happen, but it did. The reason is once you get a key for something, that key has no place else to go but on your key ring. You've got a key for your office. You've got 10 more office keys on there for offices you used to have but don't anymore. That's why they don't work. You've got keys for the side door, the back door, the sliding glass door and the garage door. You've got keys for the tool shed, the pool shed, and the storage shed. You've got keys for the gun safe, the money safe, and the "this is my stuff" safe. But there is one key on your key ring that stands out from the rest. It's more well-worn than the others because it has to be. And it's specially marked because it has to be. It is the key to your front door. It is the one key that unlocks the whole world of everything that you hold dear.

According to the Lord Jesus Christ in the very first words of the greatest sermon ever preached, there is one key and only one key that unlocks the doors to the Kingdom of Heaven. It's not the key of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, as important as that key may be. It's not even the key of being merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful. Instead, it is the key of being poor in spirit. Without the poverty of spirit, the rest of the keys on your ring don't work. Without the poverty of spirit, there is no entry. Without the poverty of spirit, there is no residency. Without the poverty of spirit, there is no salvation. Without the poverty of spirit, there is no "Christian."

But, friends, today, I don't want you to take my words for it. I want you to take Jesus' in Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs (and only theirs) is the Kingdom of Heaven. If, according to Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those and only those who are poor in spirit, it behooves to figure out: (1) who they are; (2) what they receive; and (3) why they matter, most especially in light of the fact that our residency or non-residency in the Kingdom of Heaven "resides" on being included among them. We'll do that today. But first, let us pray.

**Who They Are**

**1. Lack of Resources**

- **Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke:** That's a phrase my roommate and I in college used to describe the state of our finances. It came by way of me noticing my roommate's suitcase in the pawn shop. He did it because he was "Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke."
- **At a Core Level:** The meaning of poverty/being poor is to lack sufficient resources. When you are: "Dirt Floor Poor," or "Broke as a Joke," or "Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke," you lack sufficient resources to cope with the circumstances you are facing.
- **At a Christ Level:** Jesus takes this idea of lacking resources and moves it from the material realm to the spiritual realm with "in spirit." Now we have a riddle to solve because in Paul's writings, he calls us not to be "poor" in spirit, but to be "filled" (be rich) in the spirit. Jesus, however, borrows terminology from the psalms that describe a person's inner state in times of crisis of circumstances (Ex: Ps 142 - "My spirit grows faint within me" / Ps 51 - "renew a steadfast spirit within in me). Consequently, those who are poor in spirit lack the inner spiritual resources to cope with the circumstances they are facing.
- **App:** This is true at an entry and practical everyday level. We can't come into relationship with Jesus without the realization that we lack the inner spiritual resources to cope with our sinful circumstances. On a practical level, being in a place in your spirit where it seems like everything is crashing down around you and things are "just too much" is a good place to be according to Jesus. It means you have need of God.

**2. Nothing to Offer**

- **Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke College Student at Thanksgiving:** I've never heard of a "Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke" college student showing up for Thanksgiving Dinner bringing the Thanksgiving Turkey. Why? They are broke. They have nothing to offer.
- **Nothing to Offer God or Point to is Something Religious People Have a Hard Time Understanding:** We want to want to point to something in our lives to say to God: "Look what I bring to the table. Look what I have done. Look what I have to offer. You'll be more blessed God and your kingdom will work at lot better if you realize this about me." When that happens, we are inclined to say, like the Pharisee, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. (Lk 18:11-12)
- **But Being Poor in Spirit Comes from Knowing You Have Nothing to Offer Because You Lack Spiritual Resources:** It happens when we, like the tax collector stand at a distance, look down, beat our breast and say: "God, have mercy upon me, a sinner." It works in such a way because Jesus says it does: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God" (Lk 18:14)
- **App:** This is also true at an entry and practical everyday level. Entry level into the Kingdom begins when we tell the Lord "have mercy upon me, a sinner." At a practical level, it's the realization that you have nothing to offer in the situation that requires the help of God.

**3. Empty Hands**

- **Pawn Shop Suitcase Broke College Student Calling Home:** When college students have empty hands, they call mom and dad requesting they fill them through benevolence, benevolence and only benevolence. Similarly, God only fills empty hands. That's great news.

- **Where There's Poverty of Spirit and Empty Hands in the Psalms, There is a Visit from the Almighty to Fill Them:** (1) When Enemies Surrounded David in a Cave – “When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way” (142:3). (2) When David Needed Divine Intervention – “Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me” (143:7). (3) When David Needed Forgiveness From His Wicked and Evil Actions – “Create in me a pure heart, Oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (51:10). When David Was Dealing With Physical Illness: “Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish” (6:2-3).
- **App:** Also true at an entry and practical level. When we, poor in spirit, throw ourselves at the foot of the cross and beg for mercy, he casts our sins as far as the east from the west (Ps 103:12). As for the practical: “which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him” (Mt 7:9-10)?

### *What They Receive*

#### 1. Something Exclusive

- **The Old Man's Lamp:** (1) Do you remember the Old Man in the Christmas Story? He received a letter in the mail informing him that he won something. It was a major award. Ralphie didn't win it. The Old Man won it exclusively. And it came a box marked “fragile.” It was a lamp.
- **The Poor in Spirit Receive Something Exclusively According to Jesus:** He says: “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” This is emphatic in the language of Jesus here: (a) “to them and only to them is the Kingdom of Heaven” // It's theirs and only theirs.
- **This Was a Shocking, Offensive, Yet Revolutionary, Claim:** (1) Jesus' audience was Jewish. They were used to language of exclusivity. They, out of all the nations of the earth, were chosen by God. (2) Jesus, however, takes that language and applies it to anyone poor in spirit.
- **App:** The deadbolt on the door to heaven only works with key labeled “poor in spirit.” It's an exclusive place with exclusive people.

#### 2. Something Now

- **What The Old Man's Lamp Did:** (1) The Old Man set his lamp up in the window and went outside to make sure it was centered. People gathered around and said: “what is it?” “It's a major award.” Then he said: “let there be light to the lamp.” And, behold, there was light.
- **The Kingdom in a Nutshell:** (1) To understand it, you have to go back to the beginning of the Bible when the world went wrong. The Kingdom of Heaven is how God makes what went wrong right again. (2) Consequently, the Kingdom of Heaven is both (a) now and (b) not yet.
- **The Kingdom Was Announced as Approaching Through the Ministry of John the Baptizer:** “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt 3:9). Remember, Jesus and John were 1<sup>st</sup> cousins, both around the same age. He's a forerunner to Jesus and says “it has come near.” That's literal because the Kingdom of Heaven will be at hand when Jesus is baptized by him and begins his public ministry.
- **The Kingdom Is At Hand in the Here and the Now When Jesus Begins Preaching:** (1) Jesus preached about the Kingdom in parables, half of which are true right now. (a) The Wheat and Tares: “the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, the enemy sowed tares among the wheat” (Mt 13:24-25). (b) The Mustard Seed: “the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows, it is the largest of plants” (Mt. 13:31-32). (c) The Pearls: “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one, he sold everything he had and bought it.” All of those have implications now.
- **App:** The great thing about the Kingdom of Heaven is that this place where Jesus rules and reigns is yours as much as it is His. The reason is found in one word Jesus says about it as it relates to you: inheritance. An inheritance that comes first by being poor in spirit.

#### 3. Something Later

- **What The Old Man's Lamp Continues to Do:** (1) The house where the Christmas Story was filmed now stands as a museum with a gift shop. (2) The one item they must have a large supply of today is the Old Man's lamp. 40 years after the movie was made, the light continues.
- **Jesus Also Had Plenty to Say About the Not Yet Aspect of the Kingdom:** (1) The Ten Virgins: It's like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 5 were wise. 5 were foolish. The wise ones had oil in their lamp and met the bridegroom. The foolish ones didn't (Mt 25:1-13). (2) The Bags of Gold: The kingdom will be like a man going on a journey and entrusted his wealth to them. When he returned at a time unexpected, the owner judged them by their degree of faithfulness as stewards (Mt 25:14-23). (3) And, my favorite, (3) The Sheep and Goats: “When the Son of Man comes in all his glory, he will gather the nations before him as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mt 25:31-46).
- **What He Means:** The future aspect of the Kingdom of God is when God finishes the work of making right what went wrong. It's when Jesus makes what's true of heaven true on earth. It's when the new heavens and the new earth are created. It when the Son of Man comes in all his glory. Riding on the clouds. Shining the son. At the trumpet call.
- **App:** The greatest aspect of this glorious event is that when the last trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ shall rise. And all of this comes to those who are first and foremost poor in spirit.

### *Why They Matter*

1. It is something God makes you to be, not something you can make yourself to be.
2. The only part you play in it comes through the right kind of examination.